

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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R 161015Z OCT 75

FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6491

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, MT, UR

SUBJECT: SOVIET AMBASSADOR VISITS MALTA FOR OPENING OF
CULTURAL CENTER

1. THE NON-RESIDENT SOVIET AMBASSADOR TO MALTA, NIKOLAI LUNKOV, MADE A RARE APPEARANCE HERE OCTOBER 9-11 FOR THE OPENING OF A NEW CULTURAL CENTER SPONSORED BY THE "MALTA-USSR CULTURAL SOCIETY". AMBASSADOR LUNKOV, WHO IS RESIDENT IN LONDON, WAS JOINED IN MALTA BY ANATOLI MASKO, REPORTEDLY HEAD OF THE EUROPEAN SECTION OF THE "ALL UNION FRIENDLY SOCIETIES OF THE SOVIET UNION" (SIC).

2. UPON ARRIVAL, AMBASSADOR LUNKOV WAS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT HE HOPED TO MEET WITH PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF DURING HIS VISIT TO MALTA. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION, THE AMBASSADOR STATED THAT THE POSSIBILITY OF OPENING A SOVIET EMBASSY IN MALTA WAS A QUESTION OF "MUTUAL INTEREST", BUT ONE WHICH HAD NOT YET BEEN DECIDED. PRESS COVERAGE OF HIS VISIT WAS RELATIVELY RESTRAINED.

3. IN ADDITION TO PARTICIPATING IN THE OPENING OF THE CULTURAL CENTER, AMBASSADOR LUNKOV PAID A COURTESY CALL
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ON THE PRESIDENT, SIR ANTHONY MAMO, AND LAID A WREATH

AT THE MALTESE WAR MEMORIAL WHILE ON THE ISLAND. HE DID NOT, HOWEVER, MEET WITH MINTOFF BEFORE RETURNING TO LONDON. THE ONLY MALTESE OFFICIAL AT THE CULTURAL CENTER OPENING WAS EMMANUEL ATTARD BEZZINA, SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. NO GOM MINISTERS ATTENDED.

4. COMMENT: WE SHOULD NOT READ TOO MUCH INTO HIS FAILURE TO BE RECEIVED BY MINTOFF, WHO IS ALSO FOREIGN MINISTER. DURING THE SAME WEEK THERE WERE SEVERAL OTHER NON-RESIDENT AMBASSADORS IN MALTA WHO ALSO WERE UNABLE TO SEE THE PRIME MINISTER (BELGIAN, DANISH, FINNISH, PAKISTANI). MINTOFF CONSIDERS SUCH "COURTESY CALLS" A WASTE OF TIME AND INCREASINGLY TURNS THEM DOWN. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE MARKED ABSENCE OF GOM MINISTERS AT THE CULTURAL CENTER OPENING WAS MORE SIGNIFICANT. THERE IS USUALLY AN EXCELLENT TURNOUT OF SUCH OFFICIALS FOR SIMILAR FUNCTIONS INVOLVING OTHER EMBASSIES. IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THE OPENING OF A RUSSIAN EMBASSY IN MALTA WOULD CONSIDERABLE DISPLEASE MINTOFF'S RESIDENT FRIENDS, THE CHINESE. AS A RESULT, WE DOUBT SERIOUSLY IF THERE WILL BE A RUSSIAN EMBASSY HERE ANYTIME SOON. A GOM MINTOFF OFFICIAL TOLD THE EMBASSY THERE WAS "NO PROGRESS" ON THIS SUBJECT DURING AMBASSADOR LUNKOV'S VISIT. SMITH

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